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ABSTRACT

An overview of the textbooks for teaching directing from the 1920s through the 1980s reveals several trends in how directing has been taught. The books published before World War II indicate that classes were intended for the director of community theater and school productions. All aspects of play production are included, such as techniques of acting, lighting, and scene design. The terminology in the 1920s and 1930s was not yet standardized. Although many of the books acknowledge the artistic component of the director's work, the advice and rules in the books are very prescriptive and mechanical, leaving little room for flexibility and interpretation. Four periods of development are usually identified in the rehearsal process: script analysis, blocking, character development, and final polishing. With an increase in college enrollment generally and a growth also in the number of schools offering M.F.A. degrees, directing becomes increasingly to be acknowledged as an art form. Once people begin to question the function of the director, there is a trend toward increasing theory and experimentation in directing, as evidenced in the textbooks of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. There is no longer a sense of a right or wrong approach; instead, there is a movement toward developing an individual style. Authors choose their own emphasis within the textbooks. For example, J. H. Clay and D. Krempel focus on the director's vision while F. Hodge emphasizes the director as communicator. (Includes 32 notes and 3 tables of data.) (TB)

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TEACHING DIRECTING AS SEEN THROUGH THE MAJOR TEXTBOOKS, 1920-1989

Paper presented at the Speech Communication Association Annual Conference, November 19-21, 1994

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Directors have played a vital role in modern theatrical productions, yet the education of directors has largely been ignored by scholars of theatre. Clifford Hamar's research on theatre's entrance into the college curriculum provides information on directing programs from 1899/1900 up to the school year 1920/21.[1] Charles Ney's examination of the history of academic theatre provides little information on directing in particular.[2]

Dispite the fact that colleges in the United States have been teaching directing for over fifty years, there is still disagreement on the appropriate training for a directors. Some scholars question the extent to which "creativity, imagination, [and] leadership" can be taught. In addition, educators disagree about the educational background required of student directors.[3]

Considering both the central role of directors in theatrical production and the goal of universities to educate directors, research on the director's training in academic institutions is warranted. A complete study should examine several types of primary evidence, including college catalogs, national convention programs, and textbooks.[4] As part of a larger project, this study focuses on the question, How has the teaching of directing in colleges and universities developed as evidenced by the textbooks published on directing from 1920 to 1990?

Before proceeding to the content of the textbooks, we should examine the general patterns of publication. Analysis of the titles in Cumulative Book Index (CBI) reveals the changing terminology from production to direction, with a shift of emphasis to directing (see table 1). The word production in the 1920s and 30s was used in a general sense, relating to all aspects of staging a play, such as lighting, design, acting, and directing. Gradually the terminology became more precise, and the word production became associated with the duties of producers. In the 1920s, no books were published using any form of the word directing in the title, but four books used a form of the root word produce (producing, production). In the 1950s, the root words direct and produce appeared (directing, direction) in and almost equal number

TABLE 1. -- NUMBER OF BOOKS PUBLISHED IN DIRECTING ACCORDING TO *CBI* [a]

	1920s	1930s	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s
Direct in title[b]	0	3	3	7	17	18	19
Produce in title[c]	4	4	6	9	8	6	66

[a]All editions of books are counted. (If the same title was issued in six editions, the title was counted six times.)

[b]Any form of the root word *direct*: directing, direction, etcetera.

[c]Any form of the root word *produce*: producing, production, etecetera.

of titles, and by the 1980s the root word direct peaked, appearing in nineteen titles, while produce appeared in just six titles. These numbers indicate a shift from the emphasis on general play production to an emphasis on directing at mid-century.

When the Library of Congress assigned the subheading Production and Direction in 1943, they provided direct access to books on directing for the first time. Only seven books were published under the subheading Production and Direction from 1943 to 1949 (see table 2), but the number climbed rapidly to forty-nine by the 1980s, with a dip in publication during the 1970s. The surge of publication beginning in the 1950s corresponded to the growth of M.F.A. programs in the late 1950s and early 1960s.[5] The rapid increase in publication from the 1950s through the 1980s reflects the increasing interest in directing as a subject of specialization both in academic institutions and within the field itself.

The frequency with which a title is reissued indicates, to some extent, the popularity and demand for the book. The textbooks in table 3 are the most frequently published titles on directing, and are therefore the books I analyzed for this study.[6] In addition to number of times published, I considered the range of years that a book was published. For example, Milton Myers Smith's textbook was published over a forty-one year span, yet DeWitt Ashton's textbook was published for only seventeen years.[7] Presumably Smith included fundamental principles of directing that survived the test of time.

Although the statisics on publication indicate the demand for textbooks, only examination of the books themselves can determine the content and approach to the discipline of directing. Because of the time constraints in this presentation, I will consentrate on only the most frequently published texts from table 3. I also should mention two influential books published during the early 1900s: Gordon Craig's On the Art of the Theatre and George Bernard Shaw's The Art of Rehearsal.[8] Craig's book is cited in several directing textbooks of the early twentieth century because of his strong emphasis on the director as absolute authority and controller of conceptual

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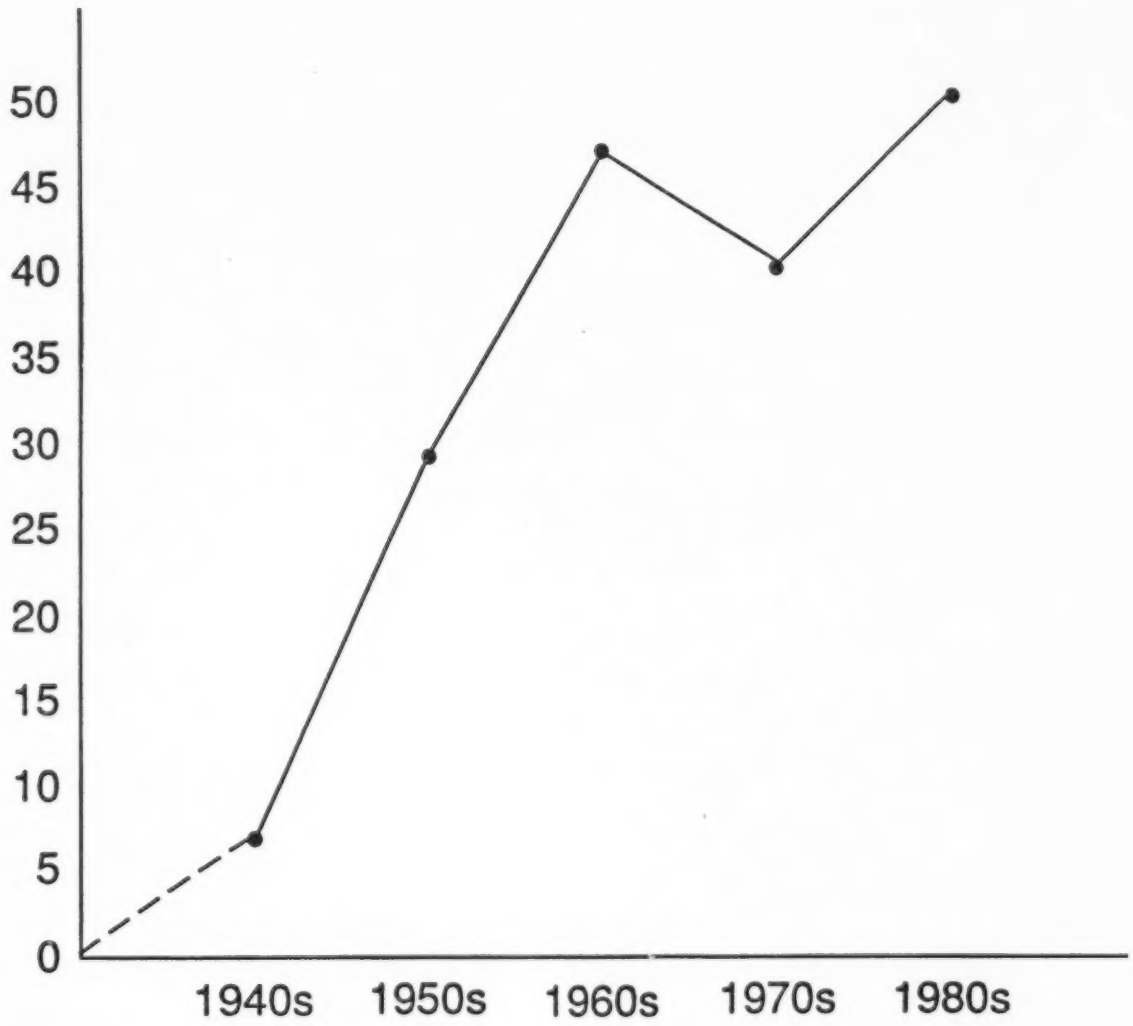
TABLE 2. -- BOOKS WITH THE SUBJECT HEADING PRODUCTION AND DIRECTION



unity. Unlike Craig's theoretical approach to theatre, Shaw's advice is very practical and prescriptive, especially as it concerns movement and interpretation of lines. Together Craig and Shaw lay a theoretical and practical foundation for the textbooks of the 1920s and 1930s.

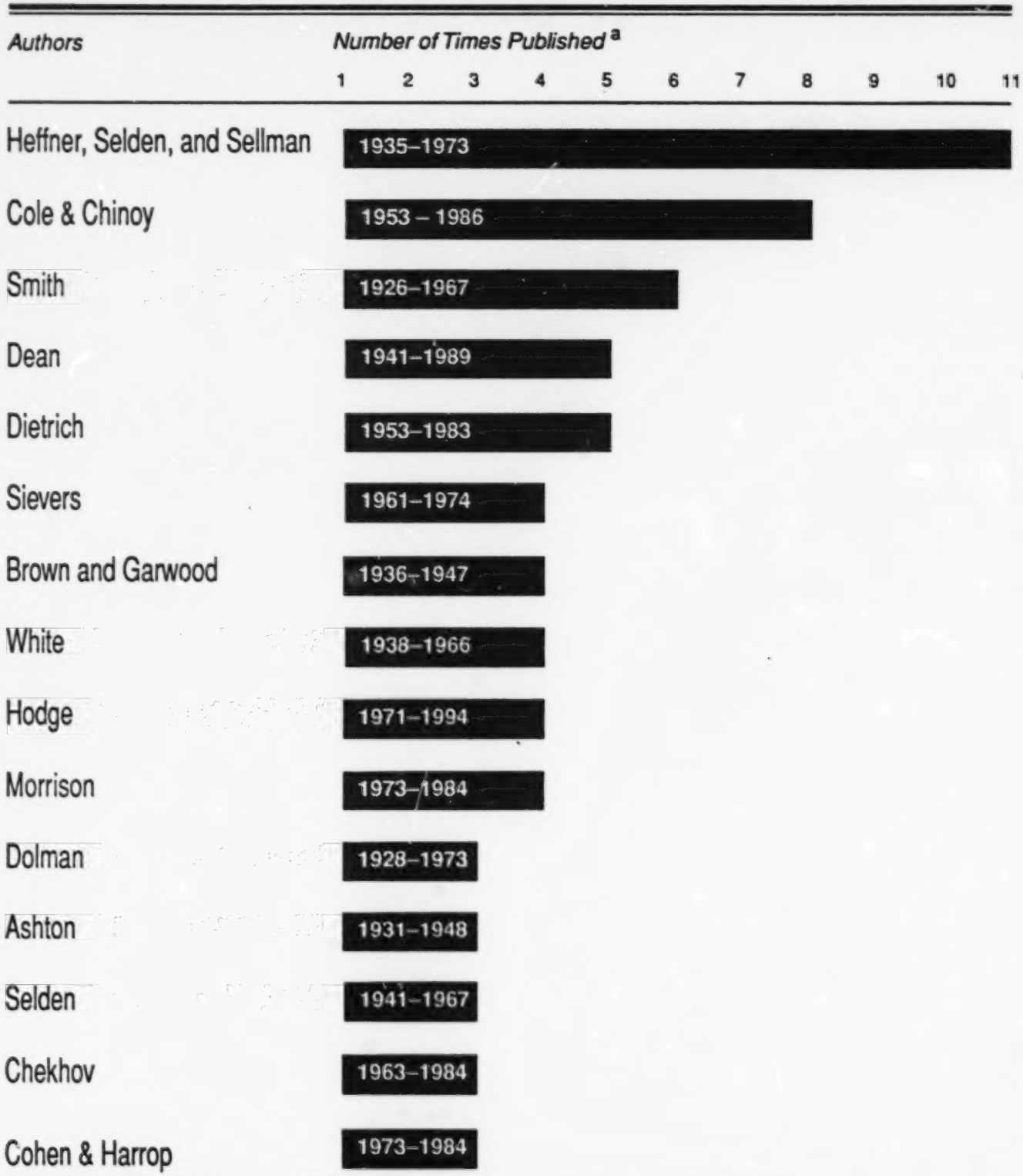
Two professors of English wrote the earliest textbooks specifically for the student of directing: John Dolman (The Art of Play Production, 1928) and Milton Myers Smith (The Book of Play Production for Little Theatres, Schools, and Colleges, 1926).[9] Dolman and Smith both acknowledge the artistic side of the director's task but focus only on techniques that can be taught. Dolman's book is intended for students of theatre or dramatic literature and for teachers producing plays. He states that the purpose of rehearsal is "to give opportunity for experiment...to teach the text and the meaning of the play to the cast....[and] to perfect and polish the performance."[10]

The most notable feature of Smith's textbook is his analysis of the "Ideas of Directing" which determine the director's function in reheasal.[11] He preceedes other authors by presenting multiple styles of directing. Smith lists the prevalent theories as: "The Craig Idea" (director as authority and creative force), "The Laissez Faire Idea" (actor as creative force, director as facilitator), and "The Proper Idea" (Smith's conviction that the director should fall somewhere between the two extremes).[12] Despite clear references to the director's function, both Smith and Dolman address much of the text to the actor and designer. The director is mainly addressed as the organizer of all other areas of production.

Based on the frequency of publication (reported in table 3), the most notable text of the 1930s is Modern Theatre Practice (1935), by Heffner, Selden, and Sellman, which is geared toward college students studying production for amateur theatre.[13] The preface explains how the textbook can be used in conjunction with practical production work.[14] The subjects covered within this textbook are not unusual, but the detail of coverage indicates a more scholarly analysis of the topic.

Although few new titles were published during the 1940s, probably in

TABLE 3. -- FREQUENCY OF PUBLICATION



[a] *Books published more than two times, based on data from CBI and OCLC First Search. Numbers in the bars indicate span of publication.*

part because of World War II, the number of textbooks published by college professors for college courses in the 1940s reflects the growing importance of directing in the classroom.

The most notable textbook of the 1940s is Alexander Dean's Fundamentals of Play Directing (1941), which was last published in 1988.[15] Dean's textbook is "...an expansion of the first third of Alexander Dean's syllabus of a course in play directing" at Yale University.[16] Dean dedicates an entire section of the book to "5 Fundamental Elements of Directing": composition, movement, picturization, rhythm, and pantomimic dramatization.[17] He provides more than a how-to approach to directing--he includes a history of directing, some theoretical discussion on the nature of art, photographs of productions labeled with staging techniques, and exercises for directors and actors.[18] Although earlier authors make reference to the history and artistic merit of directing, none treat it as a separate area of study, nor do they include the labeled production photos or classroom exercises. Subsequent textbook authors cite the influence of Dean's technical concepts as well.[19]

The textbooks of the 1950s and 1960s are more diverse than their predecessors. Judging from the content of the textbooks, the heightened awareness of global issues after World War II influenced scholars to include the theories of European directors. Hugh Hunt (Director in the Theatre, 1954) and Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy (Directing the Play, later Directors on Directing) focus on the history of directing, European directors, and theory.[20] Cole and Chinoy write that Directing the Play is a "why-to-do-it as well as a how-to-do-it book." It is the first widely published compilation of theory from European masters in directing. Both Hunt and Cole and Chinoy are more concerned with the director's vision and philosophy than earlier textbooks.

Also in the 1950s, John Dietrich and David Sievers focus on conventional directing methods in their textbooks.[21] Dietrich (Play Direction, 1953) aims his book at all levels of college students and organizes it into sections which can be consulted separately, based on the level of the reader. Sievers'

Directing for the Theatre (1961) is written for the beginning student and acknowledges the influence of both Alexander Dean and Konstantin Stanistlavki.

The publication of Michael Chekov's To the Director and Playwright provides another example of the post-World War II concern for European influences.[22] Chekhov draws a close relationship between directors and playwrights, stressing that they share a mutual understanding of the play. Following the theories of Stanislavski, Chekhov calls for mixing the order of scenes in rehearsals to gain a fresh perspective rather than progressing chronologically through the play; he also encourages directors to discover the polar beginnings and endings of each segment, then ask, "Between these two polarities, what will or should be the most important and significant moment of the act (or scene)?"[23] Chekhov's style of rehearsal would have been considered radical by the authors of pre-World War II texts.

Authors in the 1960s and 1970s began structuring books in conceptual segments instead of using a task-oriented organization. These books reflect a re-thinking of how directing can be presented. The most recognized textbooks from this era are probably James Clay and Daniel Krempel's The Theatrical Image (1967), Francis Hodge's Play Directing (1971), and Robert Cohen and John Harrop's Creative Play Direction (1974).[24] All three of these books were published again in the 1980s and are still considered for classroom use today.

Clay and Krempel take a somewhat unorthodox approach by relating plays to dreams and promoting experimentation and stylization. They focus more on the interpretation of the play than on the process of directing. In contrast, Hodge focuses on the communication process between the director and the actors and designers. Hodge advocates combining production work with study of parts one, two, and three (analysis and communication) for a beginning directing class, and production work with part four (style) for a more advanced class. Cohen and Harrop also offer organization by sections, arranging the textbook based on their "Four Concerns of Play Directing": interpretation, composition, acting, and style.[25] Both texts advocate the use of improvisation and experimentation in rehearsal as tools of discovery, and

Cohen adds a section on the new theatre to address the trends in directing and performance.

Although instructors in the 1980s continued to rely on textbooks by Hodge, Clay and Krempel, and others, several new textbooks also emerged. Two of the most prominent books from the 1980s are Robert L. Benedetti's The Director at Work (1985) and John W. Kirk's and Ralph A. Bellas' The Art of Directing (1985).[26] Benedetti's goal is to help the students "think like a director" in order to create their own techniques and better solve their own problems.[27] Throughout the textbook Benedetti emphasizes individuality and the process of discovery.

Kirk and Bellas have a slightly different approach than Benedetti; their stated intent is to "lay the foundations for successful directing by examining the nature of drama and by determining 'how a play happens' before an audience in the theatre."[28] Kirk and Bellas emphasize the function of the playwright, dramatic structure, and the primacy of action as well as the production process. Like Benedetti, they encourage discovery of a personal method; both also include exercises throughout the text to aid in instruction and personal exploration.

As directing courses became increasingly specialized, a need for specialized textbooks arose. Lee Mitchell's Staging Premodern Drama (1984) and Edward M. Cohen's Working on a New Play (1988) are written for advanced or specialized courses in directing.[29] J. Robert Wills' Directing in the Theatre: A Casebook consists solely of case study problems and discussion questions that can be used alone, in combination with a textbook on directing, or in a non-traditional setting such as a teaching lab or apprenticeship.[30]

An overview of the textbooks from the 20s through the 80s reveals several trends in how directing has been taught. The books published before World War II indicate that classes were intended for the director of community theatre and school productions. All aspects of play production are included, such as techniques of acting, lighting, and scene design. The terminology in the 20s and 30s was not yet standardized. For example, stage manager,

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director, and coach were used interchangeably to describe the director. Although many of the books acknowledge the artistic component of the director's work, the advice and rules in the books are very prescriptive and mechanical, leaving little room for flexibility and interpretation. Four periods of development are usually identified in the rehearsal process: script analysis, blocking, character development, and final polishing of the play; these basic stages are still adhered to in many theatres today. In contrast, it was not unusual for the director to read the play to the cast at their first meeting, nor was it unusual to block an entire act, or even the entire play, in one rehearsal.

World War II marked a time of change in theatre education and in higher education overall. Colleges and universities experienced a massive increase in enrollment because of the G.I. Bill, and theatre courses became more prevalent in the curriculum.[31] In addition, the United States was exposed to European influences, which were eventually reflected by the inclusion of European theory in the textbooks. Directing became an area of study distinct from production as evidenced by the changes in book titles. Textbooks from the 1940s start referring to scene work in class, and incorporating class exercises.

As the number of schools offering the M.F.A. degree in theatre increases in the 1950s and 1960s, and theatre programs grow in both number and size, we see a corresponding increase in the publication of books on directing.[32] The first trend during this period is the study of European directors and the developing emphasis on directing as an art. Once people start to question the function of the director, there is a trend toward increasing theory and experimentation in directing, as evidenced in the textbooks of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. There is no longer a sense of a right or wrong approach in directing; instead, there is a movement toward developing a individual style. Authors choose their own emphasis within the textbooks. For example, Clay and Krempel focus on the director's vision while Hodge emphasizes the director as communicator. Others, like Mitchell and Wills, write supplemental and

specialized texts for the classroom. Based on the variety of textbooks and supplemental materials available, classes on directing could have differed significantly.

No doubt some teachers of directing in the past used no text at all, just as some do not use them today. Yet the textbooks of the past offer us a glimpse into the classrooms of the past by showing us the goals, techniques, and exercises intended for instruction. As I pursue a larger study, data from college catalogs, syllabi, professional conference programs, and interviews with experienced teachers will help me gain a more complete understanding of how directors' training has developed in higher education.

ENDNOTES

[1]Clifford E. Hamar, "College and University Theatre Instruction in the Early Twentieth Century" in A History of Speech Education in America, ed. Karl R. Wallace and others (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1954).

[2]Charles Stephen Ney, "Functions of Academic Theatre Programs: An Historical and Critical Study" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1989).

[3]Carl Weber, "On Theatre Directing" in Master Teachers of Theatre, ed. Burnet Hobgood (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), 121. Weber questioned the extent to which the art of directing has been taught.

[4]Patti P. Gillespie and Kenneth M. Cameron, "The Teaching of Acting in American Colleges and Universities, 1920-1960," Communication Education 35 (Oct. 1986): 362. Gillespie and Cameron identified college catalogs, national convention programs, and textbooks as primary evidence in their study on the teaching of acting.

[5]Ney, 38-39. Ney compares statistics from the Directory of American College Theatre (DACT) from 1951 (six M.F.A. programs) to 1966 (31 M.F.A. programs). There was no indication of how many of the M.F.A. programs were in directing, however.

[6]The textbooks published in the 1980s are too new to have multiple editions, so selected texts were chosen from: 1) books that were published by major U.S. publishers (excluding academic presses), and 2) books that were reviewed.

[7]Milton Myers Smith, The Book of Play Production for Little Theatres, Schools, and Colleges (New York: D. Appleton, 1926 [later entitled Play Production for Little Theatres, Schools, and Colleges [1928, 1941, 1948, 1962, 1967]. De Witt C. Ashton, Art of Directing Plays (Franklin, OH: Eldridge, 1931 [1943, 1948].

[8]Edward Gordon Craig, On the Art of the Theatre (Boston: Small, Maynard, 1911 [1912, 1924, 1925, 1929, 1956, 1957, 1960, 1962, 1968, 1980]. George Bernard Shaw, The Art of Rehearsal (New York: French, 1928). Shaw's piece was originally published in The Arts League of Service 1921-22 Annual.

[9]John Dolman, The Art of Play Production (New York: Harper, 1928 [1946, 1973]). Smith, The Book of Play Production for Little Theatres, Schools, and Colleges.

[10]Ibid., 229.

[11]Smith, 37.

[12]Ibid., 37-8.

[13]Hubert Heffner, Samuel Seldon, and Hunton D. Sellman, Modern Theatre Practice: A Handbook for Non-Professionals (New York: F.S. Crofts, 1935 [1939, 1941, 1944, 1946, 1953, 1959, 1961, 1973]).

[14]Ibid., vii.

[15]Alexander Dean, Fundamentals of Play Directing. (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1941 [1962, 1965, 1974, 1980, 1988]).

[16]Dean, vii.

[17]Ibid., 32.

[18]Dean's photographic segment included pictures of Yale productions with labels identifying emphasis, balance, variety, and mood along with remarks on the staging of each scene.

[19]Both Frank McMullan and David Sievers acknowledged the influence of Alexander Dean on their textbooks.

[20]Hugh Hunt, Director in the Theatre (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954 [1963]). Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy, eds., Directing the Play (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merril, 1953 [later entitled Directors on Directing 1963, 1964, 1972, 1976]).

[21]John E. Dietrich, Play Direction (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1953 [1955, 1983]). John Wray Young, Directing the Play (New York: Harper, 1958 [1972]). Frank A. McMullan, Play Interpretation and Direction (New Haven, Conn.: F.A. McMullan, Yale University Department of Drama, 1952 [later entitled The Director's Handbook 1964]). W. David Sievers, Directing for the Theatre (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown, 1961 [1965, 1974]).

[22]Michael Chekhov, To the Director and Playwright (New York: Harper & Row, 1963 [later entitled Michael Chekhov's to the Director and Playwright 1977, 1984].

[23]Ibid., 87.

[24]James H. Clay and Daniel Krempel, The Theatrical Image (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967 [1985]). Francis Hodge, Play Directing (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971 [1982, 1988]). Robert Cohen and John Harrop, Creative Play Direction (Englewood, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974 [1984]).

[25]Cohen, 19.

[26]Robert L. Benedetti, The Director at Work (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1985). John W. Kirk and Ralph A. Bellas, The Art of Directing (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1985).

[27]Benedetti, xi.

[28]Kirk and Bellas, xi.

[29]Lee Mitchell, Staging Premodern Drama (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1984. Edward M. Cohen, working on a New Play (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1988.)

[30]J. Robert Wills, Directing in the Theatre: A Casebook (Metchuen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1980 [1994]).

[31]Burnet M. Hobgood, "Theatre in U.S. Higher Education: Emerging Patterns and Problems," Educational Theatre Journal 16:2 (May 1964): 143. Hobgood notes that a major period of growth was from 1945-1955.

[32]Ney, 36-9. Ney documents the rise in M.F.A. programs in theatre during the late 1950s and early 1960s. The corresponding rise in publication is apparent in table 2.